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New leaders take the dais in Fairfield

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By Michael D. Pitman

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FAIRFIELD — Fairfield City Council welcomed two new council members earlier this month when it convened its first meeting of the new year, and for one of those council members it was his first meeting for the second time.

Councilman Tim Abbott, who served as an at-large city councilman from 2006 to 2013 before term limits forced him to sit for two years, was elected in November to represent the city's Fourth Ward. He's "extremely happy" to return to the board, he said.

"As vice mayor, I plan on working collaboratively with Mayor (Steve) Miller to position our city as a place all residents and businesses are proud to call home," said Abbott, who added that Fairfield is a "premiere" community in the region.

"I think the top issue the council will face, and what we need to do, is to work collaboratively together," Abbott said. "And from the early meetings, we definitely are on the right track."

Abbott said there are three areas the city needs to focus on, the first being finances.

The city is known for its fiscal management, which has a AA1 bond rating (the second-highest possible rating from Moody's). The city's 2016 general fund expenditure budget is projected to be \$72.6 million, with \$7 million in the city's reserves.

Other focus areas, Abbott said, are the city's quality of life and its partnership with Fairfield City Schools.

Councilman Craig Keller, who was the only councilman elected last November who faced an opponent, is looking to watch and learn because this is the first elected office the 54-year-old has held. Part of that learning experience is to meet and talk with the department heads within the city's administration, he said.

"Right now it's a learning experience," Keller said. "There's a learning curve to (being on city council) ... and I'm just getting started."

As the chair of the council's Public Safety Committee, Keller hopes to work with Police Chief Mike Dickey and Fire Chief Don Bennett to ensure their departments have the tools they need.

But while he's learning, one major project "on my mind right now" is bringing an expanded Marsh Park online, he said.

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